

空白空间 WHITE SPACE

Francisco Rodríguez

The Night of the Day

2024

oil on canvas

250×200 cm ×8

overall dimensions: 250×1600 cm

Francisco Rodríguez was born in 1989, the same year that Patricio Aylwin was elected as the president of Chile. This pivotal year marked the end of a 17-year dictatorship under the rule of Pinochet. Chile's journey toward democratization and its economic development during this period was hailed as a remarkable transformation. However, Chile still governs under a constitution that was formulated during Pinochet's authoritarian regime and has faced widespread criticism for its neoliberal and authoritarian characteristics. In 2022, a historic referendum on a new constitution (considered to be the most progressive in half a century) failed to pass. This outcome highlighted the significant challenges Chile continues to face in terms of reform and development, underscoring the enduring influence of history on the nation's trajectory.

Throughout his body of work, Rodríguez has consistently explored the shifting dynamics and political dilemmas of modern Chile and Latin America by revisiting historical moments spanning decades. In his latest painting, titled "The Night of the Day," made up of eight 2-by-2.5-meter panels, spanning 16 meters in total, Rodríguez continues to explore these motifs. He sets the artwork against the backdrop of the Chilean campus environment of the 1990s, a setting he knows intimately from his own upbringing. In this 16-meter panoramic painting, Rodríguez draws inspiration from Bruegel and Chinese scroll painters, and portrays young boys engaged in activities reminiscent of their school days, transporting viewers to vivid and sometimes challenging narratives of youth within Santiago.

The title hints at the mysterious nature of time, as a crescent moon and blazing sun share the sky in the painting. In Rodríguez's painted odes to youth, the landscape is adorned with swaying trees and silhouetted mountains on the horizon. Birds move gracefully from sky to telegraph pole, while an omnipresent hum pervades the empty cityscape. Wooden fences and brick walls form a labyrinth, blocking views and creating a sense of confinement. It is a place with lurking dangers but no clear escape routes. In this environment, adolescents appear. Their confident strides kick up dust as they walk, stand, and sometimes lurk like wild dogs. They are always ready for a potential confrontation. The setting sun leaves a burnt glow on their cheeks, and despite their bravado, a smile can inadvertently reveal the unique melancholy of youth.

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If we were to view the school as the battleground for these young individuals, then their homes and classrooms function as psychological theaters—places where diverse ideologies come across. Within the confines of their rooms, the boys sleep or study while events unfold outside, much like their dreams or imagination: echoes of history, the challenges of reality, and glimpses of possible futures all converge within these walls. Rodríguez employs distinctive perspectives to dissect and unveil the inner spaces of these rooms and buildings, providing a semi-autobiographical portrayal of the young boys' inner worlds. The rooms are populated with scattered texts and images scribbled with taught knowledge and teenage thoughts, blackboards showing the geography and cultures of Latin America, posters of demonstrations or revolutions, and pictures from exotic Eastern countries; a multiplicity of ephemera all capturing the interests, confusions, and influences of the teenagers to whom the rooms belong.